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( ) Classify as ( ) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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3/21/79

Argentina

3/21/79

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DATE: March 21, 1979

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Robert Cox, Editor, Buenos Aires Herald  
Mr. F. Allen Harris, Political Officer, American Embassy, Buenos Aires

SUBJECT : Human Rights

COPIES TO : ARA/ECA - Mr. Brayshaw AMB  
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### The Timerman Detention

Mr. Cox said that he had been "called in" by the Secretary General of the Presidency, General Crespi, regarding his recent "Newsweek" story on Jacobo Timerman. Cox noted that in earlier times he had adopted "I was a naughty boy and won't do it again," attitude during these meetings, but that he was now too old for that ploy. He said that he was surprised that Gen. Crespi was poorly prepared for the interview. The meeting started in the usual friendly Argentine fashion and finally got around to "the damage done to the country."

Cox said that he replied directly that the damage being done to Argentina was not caused by the article but was caused by the military's continuing detention of Timerman in the face of the Supreme Court's decision declaring Timerman's PEN detention illegal. To Cox's astonishment, Crespi denied any knowledge of either the Supreme Court's decision or the decision by the Army's Special Tribunal which had cleared Timerman of any connection with subversion. Crespi reportedly fell back on a weak attack against the Supreme Court: Crespi maintained that if Miguel Lorenzo or Isabelita were brought before the Supreme Court, the court would find their detention illegal also.

Cox said that there were two barbs in the "Newsweek" article which the Casa Rosada especially objected to. First was the Videla quote that Timerman's being a Jew didn't help his case. The second was the impression that Videla was a weak President who did not control events in Argentina. Cox noted the irony that externally the military wish to project an image of strong executive but internally

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wished to project the image of a weak President who needs the support of all thinking people against the hardliners arrayed against him. Cox said that the government really could not have it both ways.

"Washington Post" Reporter to be "Called In"

Cox said that the Washington Post's local girl Friday had told him that the Argentine Navy has requested Charles Krause to meet with Navy officials when he returns from a Jonestown massacre book promotion tour to London. Cox believes that the reason for Krause's being called in is related to his early March story on the murder of Argentine Foreign Service Officer Elena Holmberg.

Confirmation of Deaths - Trial Balloons

Cox related stories--which also had begun to come to the Embassy--regarding the Interior Ministry's Office of Internal Security informing a few families recently that their sons had been killed in confrontations with the military forces. Cox opined that these were trial balloons by the Ministry's officials to see what the reaction of the family members would be.

Cox said that the disappearance problem was a real dilemma for the GOA, as the families would never cease searching until they had hard information on the fate of their children. On the other hand, the majority of the officers in the military felt that the policy of denial of information had to be continued out of loyalty to the military service and its members, who had undertaken to do this dirty job to save their country from the communist threat. Cox noted that even those who felt genuine sympathy for the plight of the parents within the military had an overriding concern to protect the military reputation as an institution--it was a question of institutional loyalty.

Trip to U.S.

Cox mentioned that he will be attending seminars on Argentina in the U.S. in early May at Georgetown and Harvard Universities. Cox noted that he was beginning to worry about becoming the "liberal justifier of the GOA."

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